

# Golf courses — asset or liability?

BY JUDITH FERGUSON GOCKEL

Golf and golf courses have evolved over their history from Scotsmen thriftily using sheep pastures for a form of recreation, to (occasional) modern golf courses that seem designed specifically for conspicuous consumption.

As both the beginning and the contemporary levels of the game reflect their time, it is in keeping with the long and honorable history of the game that the golf courses of the future address our modern concerns.

New golf courses are becoming a luxury. Conditions and problems facing the golf industry may soon severely curtail new construction, and could require many existing courses to undertake expensive but critical reconstruction, merely to be allowed to survive.

While the Northeast and New England are battling additional toxic additives over and above the heavy industrial pollution which threatens to swamp all natural systems in the area, the Southwest suffers water restrictions and increasing soil and water salinity.

The Southeast is dealing with an enormously increased demand for public services, including sewage treatment and potable water, and every other part of the country has some substantial concern which threatens to inhibit new golf course construction.

As the National Golf Foundation estimates that the shortfall of new courses under construction fails to meet the demand of new golfers by 150 courses per year in the United States alone, the strain on existing public and private courses can be predicted to increase, while legal and practical considerations will prevent the necessary new construction required to meet this demand.

This is a bleak outlook for a game which has satisfied its players for 500 years, and for an industry with hundreds of thousands of jobs that depend directly or indirectly on the game.

### The right perspective

Yet it doesn't have to be this way, if the role of the golf course is placed in the right perspective.

What is a golf course? It is a cultivated area planted to various types of grass, often surrounded by beautiful trees or other decorative plantings, maintained beautifully, without litter, crime, potholes, horns, loud noises or many of the other blessings of modern society.

While playing golf does not absolutely create an immunity to the hazards of modern life, it does provide a relatively safe means for recreation and enjoyment of the outdoors. It can be played by the young and the old with equal enjoyment; the novice and the expert can play together; men and women can compete on terms of equality. The game has something for everyone.

Looking (literally) deeper than the psycho-social benefits of the golf course, think about what it is made of, and how. A golf course is a constructed environment made of soils and other natural materials. It is created by shaping and laying out a design within the natural features of the native landscape.

Given these two elements, and understanding that soil is Nature's natural filter, it is possible to build a course that not only adds to the environment from the stand-

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point of utility, but that can use effluent water and/or saline water as an irrigation source, be designed to contain and rid the environment of pesticides and other such hazards, to use fertilizers and water efficiently, and actually add more to environmental quality, through cleaner water and through atmospheric oxygen/carbon dioxide exchange, than equivalent raw land.

### No fairy tale

This may sound like a fairy tale, yet each of these benefits is not only possible, but practical and available now. Achieving golf courses that can provide these characteristics can be done with existing knowledge.

To build these courses would require the active cooperation of all the parties involved in new construction: the architect, the construction company, the owners, the suppliers, the support entities such as testing laboratories and consultants, and the state and local agencies concerned — but the construction need not necessarily be more expensive or more complex than current construction methods.

The type of construction in question involves multiple small changes in construction method, plus the use of established guidelines from within the industry, such as the USGA Green Section specifications for greens construction, and outside the industry, from several sources including civil engineering and the waste treatment specialists.

It would require that careful choices be made in the selection of strains of turfgrass, choosing those best suited to the area, and

that maintenance programs be established to ensure optimum health and vigor in those grasses.

Many of these changes are technical, and detailing them here would not convey a great deal to a general readership. They would not change the strategy of the game; in fact it would be a rare golfer who could discover that the course being played differed in any way from any other, except for the high quality of the turfgrass and the decreased long-term maintenance costs of

the course itself.

If you care about the game, as a player or as one whose livelihood is dependent upon it, it may be encouraging to know that the game can go on, and that its long history need not be another victim of contemporary life.

It may also be gratifying to know that golf will continue to contribute to mankind's well-being, and to that of the world, rather than helping to destroy further the resources we have left.

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